On the Teaching of Marked Sentences

Megumi Uchida
Tokoha Gakuen University

This paper is an attempt to investigate the contribution of linguistic theory to English teaching. Generally, it is difficult for us to learn English complex sentences, in which some constituents are moved or inserted. We have so far emphasized surface structures of these sentences when teaching them. On the other hand, in linguistic theory, especially transformational generative grammar, not only surface sentences but also internal structures are dealt with. If several ideas of generative grammar are introduced to English teaching, it will be possible for us to master English easily. Concretely, we would like to show the derivations of parenthetical clauses and some differences between extraposed and non-extraposed relative clauses. Furthermore, it is also argued that the transformational approach is necessary for teaching marked sentences such as parenthetical clauses and relative clauses in English.

Introduction

In English, there are many types of "marked sentences" in which some constituents are moved or inserted. When we teach students these sentences effectively, we should not only depend on the rules of school grammar but also make use of the knowledge of linguistic theory. However, it is not adequate to introduce some ideas of generative grammar to English teaching directly, since many students cannot fully comprehend these ideas. Then we will select a few ideas and investigate how we should apply them to the teaching of English marked sentences.

Section 1 will survey the historical view of linguistic theory and account for several technical terms used in the following argument. Section 2 will deal with the derivational process of parenthetical clauses from the viewpoint of sentence grammar suggested by generative grammarians such as Chomsky. Section 3 describes some properties of extraposed relative clauses and discusses "information structure". Section 4 will show
a few proposals for the teaching technique of marked sentences like parenthetical clauses or relative clauses. Finally, section 5 is a brief of summarization of this paper.

1. Sentence Grammar and Discourse Grammar

Considering previous works as to “English grammar”, we can list three types: traditional grammar, structuralism, and transformational generative grammar. Each of them has the properties outlined below.

(1) a. traditional grammar
   prescriptive grammar: an approach to prescribe what is correct or incorrect
b. structuralism (structural grammar)
   descriptive grammar: an approach to describe the physical features of utterance
c. transformational generative grammar (generative grammar)
   descriptive grammar: a scientific approach to analyze languages

(1a) may be almost regarded as “school grammar”, while the central part of current linguistic theory is (1c). It is said that generative grammar includes elements of traditional and structural grammars. In short, the aim of this paper is to apply (1c) to (1a).

The goals of generative grammar are to describe language as a property of human mind and to explain its source. In what follows, we will observe four classical questions proposed by Chomsky.

(2) a. What is the system of knowledge? What is in mind/brain of the speaker of English or Spanish or Japanese?
b. How does this system of knowledge arise in the mind/brain?
c. How is this knowledge put to use in speech (or secondary systems such as writing)?
d. What are the physical mechanisms that serve as the material basis for this system of knowledge and for the use of this knowledge?  
   (Chomsky 1988)

Moreover, let us paraphrase the questions cited above into the particular representations in the ground of English teaching.
(3) a. What is the understanding of English or English grammar?
b. What is the mechanism to master English or English grammar?
c. How is the acquisition of English grammar related to the skill of writing or speaking English?
d. What is the physical system of mastering English?

In addition, when answering to (2a,b), we will presuppose the utterances spoken between “ideal speakers and hearers”; whereas replying to (2c), we will analyze the larger phenomena of language use in contexts, speaker intention and speech perception. In other words, (2a) and (2b) are connected with sentence grammar, while (2c) with discourse grammar. In the following two sections, we would like to investigate topics of so-called marked sentences, based on the theory of generative grammar.

2. Derivations of Parenthetical Clauses

It seems that we need at least three kinds of derivational processes of parenthetical clauses. Before argument with the derivation, we will divide verbs used in parenthetical clauses into three types as follows.

(4) a. THINK type
appear, assume, believe, convince, estimate, expect, feel, hope, presume,
reckon, reflect, remember, seem, suppose, suspect, think, wonder, etc.
b. SAY type
add, affirm, argue, assert, claim conclude, confess, declare, emphasize, explain,
inform, inquire, insist, maintain, observe, reply, say, tell, etc.
c. CHUCKLE type
accuse, chuckle, giggle, groan, mock, whisper, etc.

THINK type represents the mental mind, that is, what one considers in his mind. On the other hand, SAY and CHUCKLE types convey messages or some pieces of information. Since these types are not concerned with modality, they communicate the content of propositions. Furthermore, the THINK type and the SAY type parenthetical verbs always take S-complements, while the CHUCKLE type verb does not. Thus it should be noticed that the differences between these three types concern those of semantic and syntactic functions between them. On the basis of the classification above, we will consider three types of derivational processes.

First, we will survey the dynamic model of grammar along Kajita(1977) by illustrating the examples of THINK type parenthetical clauses.
(5) a. I presume that there is some discontent among the members.
b. Presumably, there is some discontent among the members.
c. Presumably, there is some discontent among the members.
d. There is some discontent among the members, I presume.

When (5a) is interpreted, the syntactic main clause which contains the head verb can be taken as a kind of modifiers. On the other hand, the syntactic subordinate clauses are interpreted as semantically dominant. Kajita (1977) calls this conflict head-nonhead conflict. (5a) has the same interpretation as (5b). Once there occurs head-nonhead conflict, the syntactic main clause of (5a) is reinterpreted as sentence adverb (S-adverb). And hence, we can finally get (5d) through the process figured as (5c), though we will not mention the process in detail (see Kajita, 1977).

As a result, the THINK type parenthetical clause absorbs the characteristics of S-adverb. For example, this kind of parenthetical clause can occur not only in the sentence initial but also in the position in which S-adverbs may occur.

Next, let us show the derivation of SAY type parenthetical clauses. Most of SAY type verbs listed in (4b) are used in narrative speech. As is well known, narrative speech has two types : direct speech and indirect speech. We will assume the following situation in a certain stage of language acquisition.

(6)
(7) a. He said that everybody has a little sweetheart.
    b. Everybody, he thought, has a little sweetheart.
    c. Everybody, he said, has a little sweetheart.

As illustrated in (7c), we can get sentence (7d), which regards SAY type declarative (7a) as the *base* and the THINK type parenthetical clause (7b) as the *model*. It is noticed that in the derivational process of the SAY type parenthetical clauses, direct speech must help the derivation. Therefore, it follows that the SAY type parenthetical clause inherits the properties of direct speech and those of the THINK type parenthetical clause.

In addition, there are verbs which are used as a communication verb in direct speech but which do not have *that* clause (S-complement).

(8) a. He chuckled, "I will do it".
    b. *He chuckled that he would do it.
(9) a. "He seems to be a little boy," Lydia mocked.
   b. *Lydia mocked that he seems to be a little boy.

As these examples illustrate, it is impossible to require ill-formed source like the *b*-sentences for the *a*-sentences in (8)-(9). Accordingly, we cannot account for the derivation of the CHUCKLE type parenthetical clause by the same pattern as that of the SAY type. Instead, we will propose the following derivational process for the CHUCKLE type.

(10) a.
b. He would do it, he chuckled.

As figured in (10a), the CHUCKLE type parenthetical clause is generated directly on the basis of several similarities between the SAY type parenthetical clause and the direct speech in which the CHUCKLE type verb is used. In sum, we will conclude that three types of parenthetical clauses have different derivational processes respectively.

3. Relative Clauses from the Viewpoint of Discourse Grammar

In the previous section, it was noted that the derivations of parenthetical clauses were explained in the frame work of generative grammar. In this section, we will discuss the difference between extraposed relative clauses and unextraposed relative ones from the viewpoint of discourse grammar. Generally, various information is contained in a sentence. At first, we will classify information.

(11) a. old information
   information which is recoverable from the situation of the utterance
b. new information
   information which is presented as unknown or unpredictable

Thus it is considered that there are two kinds of information in a sentence. Let us examine this idea in the following sentences.

(12) a. Yesterday I bought a clock.
   b. The clock was very cheap.

We will presuppose that (12a,b) are a course of discourse, and that italic words indicate the same object, that is, a certain clock. When the speaker says a-sentence, the hearer has already understood the referent of the clock. According to the definition (11), the clock is old information. On the other hand, hearing only a-sentence, we cannot know whether the clock was cheap or expensive. Therefore the phrase very cheap is new information, since we will come to know that information when hearing b-sentence in (12). Thus, this observation confirms that the semantic definition of information noted above is true. Furthermore, we will investigate the order of information in a sentence.
In general, it is considered that the most prominent position in the sentence is the final, and that the other prominent position is the initial. The kind of prominence associated with each of these positions differs; for the final position is a natural location of emphasis in the sentence, while the emphasis in the initial position depends on a derivation from the normal order of subject-first. On the basis of the instinct for the word order, we are apt to locate old information in the initial position and does new information in the final one, as illustrated in (13). Moreover, the naming “new” suggests that this kind of information is more important than the other information called “old”.

Concerning these properties about “information structure” mentioned above, some interesting examples are presented by Ziv and Cole (1974).

(14) a. A man who had three ears came into the room.
   b. A man came into the room who had three ears. (a-b, Ziv and Cole 1974)

It appears that (14b) has the same meaning as (14a), given that the relative clause is extraposed. Of course, it may be natural that (14a) should be regarded as the deep structure of (14b). However, the meaning of (14a) is different from that of (14b). In (14a), the proposition in the main clause constitutes the main assertion, while the proposition in the relative clause serves as the background; whereas on (14b), the proposition in the relative clause conveys the main idea of the sentence, which the speaker wishes to convey, while the main clause functions as a kind of background information.

Then, we would like to exemplify their claim with some tests. Let us consider the behavior of the word order under investigation with respect to tag questions as follows.

(15) a. *A man who has three ears is watching TV, doesn’t he?
   b. A man who has three ears is watching TV, isn’t he?
(16) a. A man is watching TV who has three ears, doesn’t he?
   b. ? A man is watching TV who has three ears, isn’t he?
Tag questions distinguish assertions from non-assertions (see Hooper and Thompson 1973). A tag question referring to the proposition in the unextraposed relative clause in the sentence like (15a) is inappropriate; whereas a tag question referring to the proposition in the extraposed relative clause in the sentence like (16a) is appropriate. This difference of acceptability leads us to conclude that there are different functions between extraposed and unextraposed relative clauses in the sentences under consideration.

Next, Ziv and Cole showed the following examples.

(17) Did a man who had three ears come into the room?
(18) a. No, no one who had three ears came into the room.
    b. Yes, someone who had three ears came into the room.
(19) Did a man come into the room who had three ears?
(20) a. No, no one who came into the room had three ears.
    b. Yes, someone who came into the room had three ears.

((17)-(20), Ziv and Cole 1974)

The answers to (17) are in (18), while (20a) and (20b) are the replies to (19). Notice that (18) cannot constitute a reply to (19), as (20) cannot to (17). In (20), the constituents from the extraposed relative clause of (19) appear in the main clause, while the constituents from the main clause of (19) appear in the unextraposed relative clause. From these contrasts, it seems that the extraposed relative clause is understood to be not the subordinate clause but the main clause of (19), and that the main clause of (19) is taken to be a kind of subordinate clause which has background information.

These examples from (15) to (20) show that under certain conditions the extraposed relative clause which modifies the subject noun phrase (the subject NP) constitutes the most important factor of the sentence, while the proposition in the main clause in the same sentence functions as background information. To the contrary, the unextraposed relative clause does not convey important information, but add background material to the subject NP.

As we have so far characterized old and new information, new information tends to be placed in the final position of sentences. Comparing assertions with propositions, the former seems to have more new information that the latter has. Considering (19) and (20), the relative clause contains new information. It follows that the status of the relative clause in (19) changes into that of the main clause as in (20). Thus, from the viewpoint of discourse grammar, not sentence grammar, we can account for the phenomenon that the relative clause is often extraposed.
4. Application of Linguistic Theory to English Teaching

One of purposes of doing research in generative grammar is to pursue the mechanism of *language acquisition*. The definition of "language" in "language acquisition" is limited to first language or a mother tongue. Needless to say, the meaning of *language teaching* is equal to the teaching of second language. There seems to be a gap between these two usages of *language*. However, the idea of generative grammar might contribute to the teaching of second language. Particularly, when teaching marked sentences observed in the previous sections, we might use some ideas and consequences of generative grammar. Then, in this section, we would like to argue that the aspects of linguistic theory can contribute to the teaching of English as a second language.

First, we will discuss the teaching of parenthetical clauses. According to our analysis in section 2, there are three types of parenthetical clauses: THINK, SAY and CHUCKLE. Each has a different derivation, though these derivational processes are corelated with one another. In teaching parenthetical clauses, we should notice the order of their presentation to students. For instance, the following order seems to be useful.

(21) 1. the understanding of THINK type declarative  
2. the understanding of direct and indirect speech  
3. the introduction of THINK type parenthetical clauses  
4. the introduction of SAY type parenthetical clauses  
5. the understanding of syntactic and semantic properties of CHUCKLE type verbs  
6. the introduction of CHUCKLE type parenthetical clauses

The order of presentations showed in (21) follows from the consequences of the derivational processes argued in section 2. Thus, if we teach these constructions systematically, students will learn them easily and interestingly.

Secondly, let us consider the usefulness of "information structure" about relative clauses. We often teach students the trigger of extraposition in terms of the stylistic conditions. However, it is necessary to notice the following points.
(22) a. The semantic properties of the extraposed relative clause are different from those of unextraposed relative clauses, although there are some syntactic similarities between them.

b. When the relative clauses are extraposed in a certain sentence, the movement is based on the condition concerned with old and new information.

c. Since new information is likely to be placed in the final position of a sentence, it follows that the extraposed relative clause contains new information.

d. New information involves more important semantic factors than old information does. In addition, in class, we can account for the notion of old and new information observed in section 3.

To sum up, we can introduce several new materials, in view of the framework of generative grammar, on the basis of the arguments in section 2 and 3.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued how effectively we should teach marked sentences to the students. Particularly, when investigating the teaching method of complex sentences, there is a need to apply the knowledge of generative grammar to it. It is often noted that generative grammar is a difficult approach. Indeed, this is true, but if the essence of this idea is understood appropriately, it will be one of the most useful guides for English teaching. When teaching English vividly, teachers must always try to select materials that the students are interested in. To do so, it is necessary to investigate all kinds of approaches as hard as possible.

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References